



December 11, 2022 - Pastor Jason Carter

**The Songs, The Story
O come, O come, Emmanuel**

Isaiah 7:14 "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."

Matthew 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name "Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

The Israelites were being ruled by the Roman Empire. The Romans were brutal and powerful in ways unlike the empires before. They would **obliterate entire kingdoms** to make a point of their power. Many kingdoms subjugated other kingdoms to gain tax revenue and while Rome did this, they also committed genocide and cultural destruction merely to **establish their dominance**.

There was a belief among people of the time that Caesar Augustus, the leader of the Roman Empire, was the divine harbinger of peace and salvation for the world. He was the emperor during the time of Jesus' birth (Luke 2).

- Celebrated as a hero after the strife of civil war, Augustus was considered the great source of peace for Rome. After defeating the enemies of Rome, he was celebrated as a great "savior" to the people. The themes of freedom, justice, peace and salvation permeated his reign. Whenever the great deeds of Augustus were proclaimed, they were presented with the Greek term *euangelion* (*You-on-gell-ion*), which is translated "good news" or "gospel".
- As mentioned above, Caesar had a large army at his disposal for any would-be revolutionary movement against the Empire. Hailed as the bringer of *Pax Romana* (*Roman peace*), he ironically sustained the so-called peace of Rome through instilling fear within the conquered territories.
- When reading the New Testament, we see that Rome imposed heavy taxation (in addition to the grain toll, there were also taxes on produce, sales taxes, temple taxes, occupational taxes, custom taxes, transit taxes, and many others).
- During the first century, Rome had dominion over Israel. In 63 BCE, after much turmoil and civil war within Israel, the Romans invaded and conquered Jerusalem. In order to keep control over the Galilean and Judean peoples, Julius Caesar and the Senate installed Herod as king. It would take Herod three years to finally gain all control over the still hostile Jews, but he would in due course keep a firm rule over the whole region.
- This is the same Herod we read about slaughtering babies when the wise men referenced Jesus the king being born.
- Not only did Herod expand the Temple in Jerusalem to be more grandiose and Hellenistic-Roman in style, but he also imposed a sacrifice that the priests would give on behalf of Rome and the emperor. The great building campaigns were not possible without greatly taxing the peoples of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, leaving the majority in poverty.

How did the Jews handle Roman rule?

- The Jews responded in various ways to the rule of Rome and the appointed governors and client-kings. Some, as in the case of the Sadducean priestly order and the Herodian dynasty, chose to live in compromise to the Empire and to implement their wishes.
- The second kind of response was a basic acceptance of Roman rule, with a readiness to challenge the Empire when injustice was evident. This was usually carried out as nonviolent subversion.
- The third response was a nonviolent rejection of Roman rule. Many scholars put Jesus into this category although several others would challenge this assumption.
- The fourth way that Jews responded to this circumstance was embodied by the Zealots in violent rejection of Rome, which would lead to the eventual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Over the course of their history, Israel had been subject to Babylon, Assyria, Persia, the Greeks, and finally Rome. They had been ruled by nation after nation for generations. Almost 2000 years after the covenant with Abraham and roughly 700 years before Jesus would even be born, Isaiah makes this prophecy: ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel". Yet there would still be another 400 years of prophetic silence.

Have you ever felt like God was being silent?

Have you ever had a prayer, a desire, a grief, a loss, a hope for years and the situation never changed?

How did you respond?

O Come O come Emmanuel*, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Satan's tyranny.

From depths of hell Thy people save and give them victory o'er the grave.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.

O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home.

Make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery.

Oh, come, our wisdom from on high, who ordered all things far and nigh; To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go.

Oh, come, desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind.

Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease, fill all the world with heaven's peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

* Both Immanuel and Emmanuel are found in the Bible. Typically, Immanuel is found in the Old Testament (Hebrew) and Emmanuel is found in the New Testament (Greek). To honor the hymn, we will use "Emmanuel."

When we sing each verse of this hymn, we acknowledge Christ as the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies. The original text created a reverse acrostic: "ero cras," which means, "I shall be with you tomorrow." That is the promise we hold to as we sing. Desperation and anticipation are themes throughout the Bible, but as we sing this song, we invite Immanuel into each seemingly hopeless situation.

Think of what it means that Jesus came to earth.

Where do you find yourself in the middle of this song due to circumstances and situations?

We need answers, we feel the weight of an issue and we too hold to a promise, a hope, a cry for God to answer on our behalf.

O Come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.

- Israel never felt that they had been liberated from exile, so leading into the New Testament era is an ingrained hope that a "new exodus" would free God's people from the "oppressive weight of empire." God led Israel out of slavery, so the Israelites assumed that when He sent the Messiah, He will lead them out of Roman rule.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

- God will meet you. **One of the keys in this Christian life is learning to trust God when we don't understand.** When life and circumstances demand we quit or curse God, when we look at our situation or circumstance and we have a decision to make, *do we have faith or flee? Do we continue and choose to put our hope and trust in God or to quit?* As believers, we choose to believe, to trust and to rejoice even before we see.
- Emmanuel- God is with us and He can handle our tough questions. Wrestle it out but decide who you trust and who you believe.
- Religion won't let you voice these questions, but faith does.
- Remember that He won't leave you and He promises that He won't forsake you; He will meet you.
- Rejoice, you will never be alone again! Rejoice, for He is working all things for your good! Rejoice, for His love is unquenchable! Rejoice, for when you are weak, He is strong! Rejoice, for in your need, you will find Him!

Religion won't let you ask the hard questions, but faith will.

**O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny.
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave.**

- Hell is both literal and figurative in this context.
- Hebrews 2:14-15 "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

**O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.**

- Jesus was the Dayspring- the new dawn, new day, new era.
- Advent is the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.

- Isaiah 9:2 "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."
- May His light dawn.
- John 1:4 "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."
- May His life be my light.

This is the promise: Because of Christ, there can be darkness surrounding and yet you still have light within you.

How is the light you carry being shown to the world?

**O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery.**

Often, we don't think of Christmas as destroying the works of Satan, but Christmas was declaration of war on sin and captivity, bondage and death.

- Though Christ appears as a baby in a manger, make no mistake- Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.
- 1 John 3:8 "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."
- "What are Satan's 'works'? Morally, he entices us to sin. Physically, he inflicts disease and seeks to destroy those who bear the image of God. Intellectually, he seduces us into error. And spiritually, he blinds the mind of unbelievers lest they see and believe the gospel." -Sam Storms

**Oh, come, desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind.
Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease,
Fill all the world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

As we enter this Christmas season, we are celebrating the arrival of a king and a kingdom that has no end.

- His name is His promise and His character- Emmanuel, God with us.
- We don't always know when or how God will meet us, but we can be confident that He will.

His name is His
promise and His
character -
Emmanuel,
God with us!

In this season, we celebrate Jesus coming to earth. And, in the places where we need Immanuel, God with us, **may the fullness of Jesus meet us!**

Take a moment and tell God why you are thankful for Him.

Take a moment and ask God to be Immanuel in your life.

Pray: *May your life be our light.
May your light dawn in our hearts and situations beyond our control.
Be Immanuel, God with us.*